United Nations A/ES-10/783–S/2018/505

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
5 June 2018

Original: English

General Assembly
Tenth emergency special session
Agenda item 5
Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Security Council
Seventy-third year

Identical letters dated 25 May 2018 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

Tensions continue to rise and the situation continues to deteriorate in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as Israel, the occupying Power, persists with its military aggressions and human rights violations against the Palestinian people. Israeli settlement activities, the blockade and targeting of civilians of the Gaza Strip, home demolitions, evictions, military raids, inflammatory rhetoric and provocations not only continue but are rapidly escalating.

The death toll from Israel's deliberate and lethal attacks on civilian protesters in the Gaza Strip in particular continues to rise as several of the victims have succumbed to their wounds since the time of our previous letter to you. Thousands of injured civilians also continue to be in need of emergency medical care, intensifying the demand on Gaza's extremely overstretched and depleted health-care system and further highlighting the deep trauma and human cost being borne by countless innocent civilians and their families in the aftermath of these attacks by the Israeli occupying forces, in grave breach of international law.

At the same time, Israel, the occupying Power, persists with its seizure and colonization of Palestinian land in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, also in grave breach of international law and in deliberate defiance and violation of Security Council resolutions. As reaffirmed by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process in his briefing to the Security Council on 23 May 2018, settlement construction and expansion in particular in Occupied East Jerusalem and the surrounding areas continue unabated, further fragmenting the contiguity of our land and further destroying whatever viability may be left of the two-State solution.

All these unlawful and destructive actions are exacerbating the already critical and fragile conditions on the ground, creating further despair among the Palestinian civilian population and leaving no doubt whatsoever regarding Israel's rejection of the most basic tenets of international law and the pillars of a just peace, which the

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State of Palestine still remains committed to achieving, along with the rest of the international community.

In this regard, I must draw your attention to the provocative announcement two days ago by Israeli Minister Avigdor Lieberman of the intention to implement plans for the immediate construction of 2,500 units in at least 30 illegal settlements throughout the occupied West Bank. In addition, plans have been announced for another 1,400 units to follow, bringing the total to 3,900 units, entailing the transfer of thousands upon thousands more illegal Israeli settlers to our land.

Such actions constitute further flagrant violations of international law by the occupying Power, including of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), and the consistent global calls upon Israel to cease completely its illegal, destructive settlement campaign in the Occupied State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem. These violations must be roundly and unequivocally condemned, and Israel must be demanded to immediately and completely cease these illegal acts.

These repeated declarations by Israeli officials and the pursuit of such schemes underscore yet again the true nature of Israel's colonialism, expansionism and lawlessness. Israel is blatantly seeking to enlarge its extremist settler population and superimpose "Greater Israel" on all of historic Palestine, working non-stop to de facto annex large areas of land in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Regrettably, the recent provocative and unlawful moves by the United States, Guatemala and Paraguay have only further emboldened Israel to continue with its illegal settlement enterprise, regardless of international law, regardless of the international consensus and regardless of the consequences.

Today, we are also compelled to draw your attention to the dangerous intensification of the dehumanization of the Palestinian people in Israeli rhetoric, as well as in some statements delivered at the Security Council.

While since 30 March 117 unarmed Palestinian civilian protesters have been shot dead by Israeli occupation forces and over 13,000 people injured, many of whom have been severely and permanently debilitated, the occupying Power continues to illogically and brazenly insist that it is the victim and that it is the one being endangered by the defenceless civilian population it is occupying. We absolutely reject such claims and this absurd and demeaning narrative, which is totally contradicted by the high number of Palestinian casualties and even the kinds of wounds sustained by thousands of innocent Palestinian civilians, including children, at the hands of the Israeli occupying forces.

It has been reported by several international organizations, including human rights groups, that the types of wounds sustained by those killed or injured by Israeli snipers reveal that the bullets used against protesters had been designed with the intent to kill. On hunting websites, 7.6 mm bullets are advertised as being "designed to mushroom and fragment" and "to do maximum internal damage to the animal". Such ammunition has been used by Israeli snipers against unarmed Palestinian men, women and children protesting for their rights.

According to the Medical Aid for Palestinians organization: "The majority of injuries have been to people's legs, and in many cases there is a very real risk of amputation. ... the kinds of wounds they have suffered will potentially maim them for life." The Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) also confirmed that "the demonstrators had been systematically shot either in the lower limbs (shattering femurs, knees and ankles), in the abdomen, the back or the head" and that the health-care system in Gaza had reached "a breaking point", with Gaza facing "a major human and health-care disaster".

Despite the plethora of evidence presented by human rights organizations and paramedics and journalists working on the ground, and by eyewitness accounts and video footage, describing and showing Israeli snipers, tanks and drones targeting peaceful Palestinian protesters, it is deeply regrettable and worrying that some States seem to believe that Israel is capable of no harm and that the harm done to Palestinians must have been provoked by and a result of their own doing.

This reflects layers upon layers and years upon years of the dehumanization of the Palestinian people, whereby the actions of Palestinians cannot be seen merely as those of human beings seeking freedom, but rather are seen through a distorted prism of terrorism. A Palestinian child, woman or man holding a Palestinian flag and asking for basic human rights is classified either as a terrorist or as having been manipulated by a terrorist. There is no third alternative: that these people are simply humans, like everyone else in this world, wanting to live normal, ordinary lives, in freedom, in peace, away from occupation and away from the decades of dispossession, deprivation and captivity that they have been forced to endure.

This tragic reality was starkly reflected in the statement of 18 May by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights regarding Palestinians protesting: "But they are, in essence, caged in a toxic slum from birth to death; deprived of dignity; dehumanized by the Israeli authorities to such a point it appears officials do not even consider that these men and women have a right, as well as every reason, to protest."

Recognizing this phenomenon, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA stressed, at a press briefing in Gaza City on 22 May, that: "Dehumanizing an entire community will bring no peace to the region. Recognizing that Palestine refugees have the same rights and aspirations as everyone on this planet, that they have the right to live safely, in freedom, with adequate and essential services and opportunities, is essential." Furthermore, Lakhdar Brahimi of The Elders recalled that: "Palestinians have the right to fight for their rights with all the legitimate means available to them. This includes peaceful protest; Palestinians in Gaza are just as entitled to exercise this right as Israelis in Tel Aviv or Americans in Washington."

Here we must also recall that such protests against Israeli oppression are not new. Palestinians have been protesting and rejecting the unbearable conditions they have been facing for the past 70 years across the decades, desperately seeking to call attention to their plight. The attempt to connect all Palestinian protesters to one particular political group or to claim that they are being manipulated by one group is therefore not only inaccurate but also provocative, insulting and dismissive of their long-standing call for freedom and justice and for the rights they continue to be so cruelly denied.

Such systematic dehumanization of the Palestinian people compels us to insist on the humanity of the Palestinian people, which is being so callously dismissed. Palestinians, like their fellow human beings, are a people who cannot endure decades of violent oppression, domination and control by the Israeli occupation forces without at least voicing their rejection of this injustice, including by means of peaceful protest. It is not strange but rather normal and should be expected under the circumstances that Palestinians would rise up to protest the unbearable conditions forced upon them. There is no justification for a country to lay siege to millions of people and to kill and maim them when they dare to call for freedom.

In this regard, it must also be stressed that the shooting of peaceful protesters in Gaza is certainly not the first time that Israel has targeted and terrorized civilians, but rather follows a long pattern of Israeli violence and terror against Palestinian civilians. It has done so prior to and since its inception, including through terrorist groups such as the Irgun and the Haganah. In fact, in 2009, the United Nations Fact-

Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict concluded that the objective of Israel's military assaults on Gaza was to punish, humiliate and terrorize the civilian population.

The destructive impact of the above-mentioned violations is immense. This cannot be overemphasized in a situation marked by rising tensions, deteriorating socioeconomic and humanitarian conditions and deepening anger and despair among the Palestinian people living under this more than half-century occupation. We call yet again on the international community, including the Security Council, to ensure protection for the Palestinian people, to undertake serious and concrete measures to bring about a full cessation of all settlement activities and to hold Israel accountable for all its crimes before it is too late and the prospects for a just peace evaporate. In this regard, recent events further affirm the imperative need for the International Criminal Court to open an immediate criminal investigation into Israel's flagrant violations of international law.

This is a matter of urgency. It can no longer suffice to condemn or simply be appalled by Israel's illegal actions; practical measures are necessary to bring an end to Israel's occupation. The Security Council must immediately act to uphold its duties under the Charter of the United Nations and implement its own resolutions, without exception. This is the first and most vital step for signalling to the occupying Power that its defiance will no longer be tolerated and for compelling a halt to Israel's violations, creating an environment conducive to the dialogue and negotiations needed to bring about an end to this monumental injustice so that the Palestinian people can finally live in freedom and dignity in their own independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Despite the decades of oppression faced by the Palestinian people, we remain committed to justice, to human dignity and to the conviction that peaceful diplomatic, political and popular means and international legality will lead to an end of our suffering. We trust that one day our steadfastness in the midst of this oppression will be seen as a tremendous inspiration that, despite everything, we managed to live with dignity and uphold the values of the international legal system.

The present letter is in follow-up to our previous 636 letters regarding the ongoing crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which constitutes the territory of the State of Palestine. Those letters, dated from 29 September 2000 (A/55/432-S/2000/921) to 22 May 2018 (A/ES-10/782-S/2018/485) constitute a basic record of the crimes being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people since September 2000. For all of these war crimes, acts of State terrorism and systematic human rights violations being committed against the Palestinian people, Israel, the occupying Power, must be held accountable and the perpetrators brought to justice.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter distributed as a document of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 5, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations